

**CITY OF BRIDGEPORT
CHARTER REVISION COMMISSION
SPECIAL MEETING
JANUARY 24, 2012**

ATTENDANCE: George Estrada, Harry Weichsel, Charles Valentino, Ruben Felipe, Cathleen Simpson, Florisca Carter, William J. Marshall

STAFF: Mark Anastasi, Bridgeport City Attorney; Atty. Steven Mednick; Atty. Edward Bailey

OTHERS: Council Member Martin McCarthy; Council Member Susan Brannelly; Council Member Angel dePara; Council Member Andre Baker.

SWEARING IN OF THE MEMBERS OF THE COMMISSION.

Atty. Anastasi swore in Charles Valentino; Florisca Carter; George Estrada; Harry Weichsel; Cathleen Simpson; Ruben Felipe and William J. Marshall.

CALL TO ORDER.

Atty. Anastasi stated that all the Commissioners were sworn in and present and that the meeting could be called to order at 7:15 p.m.

ELECTION OF OFFICERS.

**** MR. VALENTINO MOVED TO NOMINATE MR. RUBEN FELIPE AS THE ACTING CHAIRMAN.**

**** MS. SIMPSON SECONDED.**

There were no further nominations from the floor.

**** THE MOTION TO NOMINATE MR. RUBEN FELIPE AS THE ACTING CHAIRMAN PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

Attorney Anastasi then handed over the Chairmanship of the meeting to Acting Chairman Felipe.

Election of Chair

Acting Chairman Felipe then opened the floor for nominations for the Chairmanship of the Bridgeport Charter Revision Commission.

**** MR. ESTRADA MOVED TO NOMINATE MS. CATHLEEN SIMPSON AS THE CHAIR FOR THE BRIDGEPORT CHARTER REVISION COMMISSION.**

**** MR. VALENTINO SECONDED.**

There were no other nominations from the floor.

**** MR. VALENTINO MOVED TO CLOSE THE NOMINATION FOR CHAIR OF THE BRIDGEPORT CHARTER REVISION COMMISSION.**

**** MS. SIMPSON SECONDED.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

**** THE MOTION TO NOMINATE MS. CATHLEEN SIMPSON AS THE CHAIR FOR THE BRIDGEPORT CHARTER REVISION COMMISSION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

Election of Vice Chair

Acting Chairman Felipe then opened the floor for nominations for the Vice Chairmanship of the Bridgeport Charter Revision Commission.

**** MS. SIMPSON MOVED TO NOMINATE MR. GEORGE ESTRADA AS THE VICE CHAIR FOR THE BRIDGEPORT CHARTER REVISION COMMISSION.**

**** MR. VALENTINO SECONDED.**

There were no other nominations from the floor.

**** MR. VALENTINO MOVED TO CLOSE THE NOMINATION FOR VICE CHAIR OF THE BRIDGEPORT CHARTER REVISION COMMISSION.**

**** MS. SIMPSON SECONDED.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

**** THE MOTION TO NOMINATE MR. GEORGE ESTRADA AS THE VICE CHAIR FOR THE BRIDGEPORT CHARTER REVISION COMMISSION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

Election of Secretary

Acting Chairman Felipe then opened the floor for nominations for the Secretary of the Bridgeport Charter Revision Commission.

**** MR. MARSHALL MOVED TO NOMINATE MS. FLORISCA CARTER AS THE SECRETARY FOR THE BRIDGEPORT CHARTER REVISION COMMISSION.**

**** MR. VALENTINO SECONDED.**

Acting Chairman Felipe then gave a brief overview of the duties of the secretary for the Commission. There were no other nominations from the floor.

**** MR. VALENTINO MOVED TO CLOSE THE NOMINATION FOR SECRETARY FOR THE BRIDGEPORT CHARTER REVISION COMMISSION.**

**** MS. SIMPSON SECONDED.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

**** THE MOTION TO NOMINATE MS. FLORISCA CARTER AS THE SECRETARY FOR THE BRIDGEPORT CHARTER REVISION COMMISSION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

Acting Chairman Felipe then turned the chairmanship over to Ms. Simpson.

PRESENTATION BY COUNSEL.

Atty. Anastasi then gave a brief overview of his role with this Commission. He said that there were two other attorneys, Atty. Ed Bailey and Atty. Steve Mednick also present to assist the Commission in their work.

Atty. Bailey introduced himself to the Commissioners and gave a brief overview of his work experience in this area.

Atty. Steven Mednick greeted the Commissioners and gave an overview of his work in this area. He explained that the time frame for this revision is tight because the Mayor wished to have one of the issues on the November ballot.

Atty. Mednick said that State Home Rule Act was passed in the 1950's in order to relieve the General Assembly of having to rule on items that have to do with individual cities and required a Special Act of the State Legislature. He noted that there have been times when piecemeal approaches to Charter Revision can have unintended consequences. Having regular revisions of the Charters is important to insure that it remains current.

The City Council has requested that the Charter be made more like the Constitution. Bridgeport's Charter is actually better than many others. Secondly, the Council wants the Commission to create more public accountability in the area of Education. There are two public hearings required in the process. Atty. Mednick recommended a meeting with the members of the Council, with the Mayor and with the individual department heads. This will provide the Commission with the information regarding the various concerns of the different departments. However, the City Council is legislative body, the appointive body and the ultimately body with the final authority.

Atty. Mednick recommended that the Commission start small and explained that the Commissioners now had a copy of the Charter to read and red-line for discussion chapter by chapter. Atty. Mednick cautioned the Commissioners about the Special Acts Provisions and the entailed subpoena powers. The document should be organized in a way that organizes the functions of the government. He suggested the Commission consider moving as many of the Commissions and Boards to the Code of Ordinances rather than having them remain in the Charter.

The process starts with the public hearing and then moves to overview meetings with the City Council; the Mayor and the department heads. This should be followed with a red line session, which is a page by page analysis of the entire Charter. Having a definition section is highly recommended. Also it will be important to consider the issue of electronic notification of meetings along with the regular notice in the newspapers that is now required by law. The second public hearing will be done before submitting the document to the Council.

During May, the Commission should submit the document to the Council for their consideration. The Council has up to 60 days to approve the document. If it is returned to the Commission with changes, there will be a 30 day period for adjustment. Hopefully, this revision will be a cooperative effort between the Council and the Commission.

Mr. Valentino asked about the Council changes. Atty. Mednick explained that if the Commission realizes that the final approval is from the legislative body, it will work better. Atty. Anastasi reminded everyone that the City has two of the top Charter Revision attorneys at their disposals. He said that when the attorneys suggest proposals, it will be important to remember that the Commissions makes ultimate decision.

Mr. Felipe asked about the details of the two public hearings. He said that while the Commission wants to be inclusive, but also realize that if 200 people show up at a meeting, it will be a challenge to allow everyone to be heard. He also suggested that written testimony would be very welcomed. Atty. Anastasi explained that the Land Use Commission sets a time limit and allows everyone to speak. Those who have more to say can come back after everyone has finished. Atty. Mednick pointed out that while two public hearings are required, there is no limit on the number of public hearing. Atty. Anastasi agreed what the idea of having written testimony is one that is very helpful.

Mr. Felipe asked about having experts testify. Atty. Mednick then reviewed the process for this.

Mr. Weichsel asked why there was such a constricted timeframe. Atty. Mednick said that the Mayor wants this issue on the November ballot and that in order to get it to the State in September, the Council would have to finalize the revisions by August.

Ms. Simpson asked why the Commissioners had been asked if they had particular agendas during the interview process. Atty. Mednick replied that it is important to have a group of neutral Commission members and not people who are advocates. The objective is to come up with a good, sensible and workable charter for the public. It will be important to give the public their due along with the Council members.

Mr. Estrada asked what the process would be when an area comes up that requires expert information. Atty. Mednick said that it would be important to have the regular meetings set up and it will begin to gel after the first public hearing. Atty. Bailey pointed out that the Commission is creating a framework to allow City to solve the problems. The Commission is not expected to solve the problems, simply provide the City with the tools to do so.

Mr. Valentino asked if it was possible to work on the simpler issues first and then focus on the hot topic, such as the Board of Education. Atty. Mednick noted that because of the short timeline, the Commission may be working on multiple issues at one time. He said that there may have to be some subcommittees created to deal with issues like red-lining. Atty. Bailey said that it is important to keep moving forward and that there have been instances where items that everyone thought were in the Charter actually were not. Atty. Mednick said that there were also unexpected issues that came up over arcane details.

Mr. Weichsel asked about the quorum. Atty. Mednick said that there was a possibility of having workshops, where there was no actions taken, but work was moving forward. Those may not require a quorum. A formal quorum for meetings in which actions will be taken will be four.

Mr. Weichsel asked what the Commissioner's responsibilities after May 1st. Atty. Mednick said that the Commissioners' role after the document is submitted to the Council would depend on the relationship between the Commission and the Council. If the Council has recommendations, then the Commission has 30 days to deal with the issues. After that 30 day period, the Commission ceases to exist.

Ms. Carter asked how the Commission would determine what the various issues that needed to be address were. Ms. Simpson said that the public hearing will bring the issues forward. Atty. Mednick said that the Commission should have a good idea of the important by the middle of February.

SCHEDULE OF FIRST PUBLIC HEARING AND MEETINGS.

Mr. Felipe suggested that the date of the public hearing be scheduled. He suggested the first public hearing be scheduled for January 31st. The discussion then moved to the starting time of the public hearing and the length of time a speaker could address the Commission. Atty. Mednick suggested that the Commission have a second date ready in case of large turnout in order to recess the meeting to the second date. A firm closing time was also discussed. It was decided that the Commission would decided on a firm closing at the meeting.

Ms. Simpson asked what would happen if someone refused to leave or became unruly. Atty. Anastasi said that FOIA does allow the Commission to remove anyone who is unruly or causing a problem. Atty. Bailey said that frequently, there are a small number of people who have a lot of information, but the majority of the speakers have a smaller amount of information. Three minutes per speaker could mean 20 speakers an hour, but may not.

Atty. Mednick suggested that the Commission schedule a spill over night and include this in the public notice. Mr. Felipe said that he had other commitments from Feb. 2 through the 6th. Atty. Mednick distributed a tentative schedule of meetings. It was suggested that February 1st be scheduled as a spillover date. Discussion followed. Starting Feb 7th, the meetings will be every Tuesday and Thursday.

Mr. Felipe said that he has all the contact information. If someone can't make a meeting, it will be important to contact the chair.

Atty. Mednick then reviewed the information in the Charter binder with the Commission.

Mr. Estrada asked what the Commission should read for the meeting next Wednesday. Atty. Mednick said that the Commission should read the first two or three chapters of the Charter.

Atty. Anastasi said that having a schedule of regular meetings will allow the Commission to add items to the agenda. The start time for the meetings will be 5:30 p.m.

Mr. Valentino asked about Commission members meeting to talk about the Charter. Atty. Anastasi said that any substantive work should be done in the Commission. The FOI Commission frowns on groups conducting the substantive business even with less than a quorum.

Mr. Felipe will check into room availability.

OTHER BUSINESS.

There was no other business to conduct at this time.

ADJOURNMENT.

**** MR. VALENTINO MOVED TO ADJOURN.**

**** MR. ESTRADA SECONDED.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The meeting adjourned at 8:35 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Sharon L. Soltes
Telesco Secretarial Services

